

After the Reich: The Brutal History of the Allied Occupation

Book Review

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After the Reich: The Brutal History of the Allied Occupation, by Giles MacDonogh. Basic Books, New York, 2007. 618pp., illustrated, with notes, bibliography, indexed.

A recent work with some refreshing angles on the post-WW2 occupation of defeated Germany is always welcome, minimally at least as a small antidote to the continued appearance of Holocaust-related works which seem to endlessly exhaust and over-exhaust every minute aspect – real or imagined – of that 'footnote' to the Second World War. This work by Giles MacDonogh is not perfect, and no one should expect it to be so when so much that is historically 'inconvenient' surrounding that period is still hidden today or is ignored or pressured into a 'memory hole' oblivion. In fact, overall, this book is quite useful and informative and is recommended to all revisionists and others interested in this period of our history.

As a brief aside, I sometimes wonder if book reviewers actually read the works they comment on. The rear panel citation from Thomas Burleigh insists that MacDonogh 'never loses sight of the fact that this was an occupation that the western powers got right'. Actually a careful reading of the book reveals that a central thrust of the author is to point out how very badly ALL of the allies administered defeated Germany, even to the point at which a great many Germans were regaining sympathy for National Socialism because of years and years of post-1945 occupation in which starvation, pillaging, demontage, rape, murder, requisitioning of a high percentage of surviving homes, etc. reflected the misery of so many average Germans. The purported goal of persuading the occupied to embrace the social and political systems of the USA, Britain, France, or the USSR was being torpedoed by the very occupiers themselves in their consistent policies of continuing to regard the defeated population as 'the enemy' who must needs be 'punished'.

This 'punishment' is ably catalogued by the author in all important regards, detailing the crimes committed against the vanquished by the victors and even adding a few new categories which other historians typically have under-emphasized.

Geographically Germany was radically reduced in size as Austria was made independent again, the Sudetenland was returned to a reconstituted Czechoslovakia, and whole provinces were torn away and handed to a newly emergent Poland – from the German entity of Prussia which was made to cease to exist entirely. France took the provinces of Lothringen-Elsass, Luxembourg was broken off, and the German South Tyrol went to Italy (again).

The German people themselves were physically punished. All of the victor powers kept food away from the population, reducing it to well below daily nutritional requirements and unintentionally but unavoidably forcing into existence a black market economy to enable sheer survival. The Russians routinely raped German women, and not just in the immediate takeover. It actually went on as a daily experience for several years in many areas, and even men were raped. Beatings, torture, deprivation of medical treatment and of shelter, were fairly routine too. The French deliberately brought in black colonial troops from Morocco and elsewhere and unleashed them upon the helpless German civilian

communities. The Americans did something similar with a high proportion of black American troops. The British were slightly more restrained but inflicted 'punishment' in other ways – especially with absurdly reduced daily rations for the occupied and which resulted in mass starvation – especially for infants and small children.

Industrially, the Soviets, French, and British practiced the dismantlement-theft of whole industries and dragged same off to their own homelands. The western Allies eventually woke up to the reality of how counter-productive this was and put a stop to it, but the Soviets took a bit longer to end the practice. The Americans had little in the way of industrial needs or desires and tended instead to make off with whatever seemed eminently lootable – although all the victors did this of course. Masses of Germans were literally enslaved to run mines in Poland and stolen industrial concerns taken to France. German scientists (and many others) were spirited off to the USSR and to the USA. While these enslavements and forced deportations were occurring, individual Germans were on trial in victor 'war crimes' courts for doing the same thing – an irony not lost upon the author.

If not for the tragedy of it all, the practices of the Russians were almost comical. As the Soviet forces entered modern Germany, they found themselves unable to comprehend all that they had at their feet. Even the flush toilet was something new and amazing to most of them, and much of what was looted was not understood or served them no practical purpose.

Culturally, socialists and communists – including a very high number of Jewish internees recently released from concentration camps or importing themselves into Germany from the USA, Britain, or elsewhere – were given virtual control of a revamped German cultural life, including theatre, music, publishing, newspapers, etc. The population was deprived of anything remotely National Socialist or nationalist in nature, and were instead fed on an imposed internationalist-socialist intellectual life. Almost literally in fact, as the starving population thirsted for music, books, etc. to take their minds off their hunger and other deprivations. MacDonogh explores the development of postwar Germany's literature in particular, as well as the various disputes between exiles and anti-Nazis who stayed in Germany throughout the war.

Politically the punished received an imposition similar to that of the cultural realm, as fairly quickly the Russians and Americans granted the 'freedom' to the Germans to choose their own representatives and government – up to a point, that is – and so long as it (a) excluded National Socialism, (b) closely resembled the systems practiced by the victors, and (c) remained under the overall control of the Allied military governors and their troops. This strange form of self-government was formalized with the formation of the Adenauer government in 1949, and the author provides a number of interesting insights into Adenauer's own goals and how the Allies viewed and used him. The author details the formation of the various new political parties, their goals, and the extent to which they were controlled or directed by the victors. He cites the failure of Soviet policy in which their own sponsored candidates failed dismally in early elections, largely because of German women voters who saw a vote for Soviet sponsored candidates as a vote for rape.

The treatment of captured German POWs is covered, in which MacDonogh cites their re-categorization from POWs into 'DEPs' (disarmed enemy persons) and thus airily (and illegally) erasing their Geneva Conventions protections; he minimizes the numbers of their fatalities under the new acronyms, resultant to starvation and deprivation of shelter and medical care. Millions of POWs – now 'DEPs' – living in holes dug out of the mud in sub-zero temperatures and without sufficient food and no medical

care did not afford much of a life-expectancy, all the more so as their captivity dragged from months into years. But the author's own politics intrudes, as indeed he indulges a common practice of that period in which the Cold War began, by attributing or shifting responsibility for the huge numbers of 'missing' German prisoners to the Russians.

Revisionist authors who have done outstanding work in this area are mostly ignored. James Bacque, for example, is mentioned briefly, but only to be dismissed without argument, his detractors' assumptions and criticisms being apparently blindly accepted. An exception is that of the several citations of Victor Gollancz's books and his central argument that starving and mistreating the civilian population of Germany did nothing to advance the moral or political agendas of the Allies and instead merely created new enemies and the possibilities of new conflicts.

The consequences of the Holocaust are presented by MacDonogh with a few rather revealing snippets. He repeatedly cites the amazing reappearance of improbably large numbers of Jews as Nazi power collapsed, they emerging both from the opened camps as well as from all over Germany itself – this being rather strange in view of the received history of a Nazi system efficiently exterminating them all. Many of these Jews were almost immediately re-established into positions of power and influence along with their co-religionists who had been resident in Britain and America during the war. Unfortunately the author jumbles some fiction with fact, for example when citing human lampshades as a reality at Buchenwald, or stating that the German military men mass-murdered at Dachau after the Allied takeover in 1945 were SS guards (actually they were ordinary military who had nothing to do with the camp administration), or as he mentions the former Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Höss's testimonies as reliable (when in fact they were often false and resultant to beatings and torture).

The great deal of material he presents about the crimes against German civilians by Poles and Czechs seems to lack any knowledge of John Sack's work *An Eye for an Eye*. Sack pointed out that many 'Jewish avengers' who ran the concentration camps filled with German civilians after the war, in which beatings, torture, murder, etc. were routine, used Polish, Czech, etc. names to hide their own ethnicity and/or misattribute it to that of others. MacDonogh seems to be wholly unaware of this aspect.

Disagreements amongst the victors are explored in this book in several very interesting regards. The French desired to seize huge areas of western Germany but the British and Americans blocked this. The British and Americans combined their zones into 'Bizonia' but the French long resisted the formation of 'Trizonia' as they fought hard to prevent any form of German unification. Most interesting of all is the fact that the Soviets wanted ALL of Germany reunified – but of course under their own sponsored communist system and control; it was the United States that pushed forward 'Trizonia' and the independence of West Germany, dividing it from the eastern zone which the Soviets were belatedly forced to re-work into the 'German Democratic Republic'.

The Berlin Airlift is given a great deal of space, especially with regard to its origins within a failed Soviet political stratagem embarked upon in angry response to the American alteration of the German currency in the USA zone of occupation.

The somewhat intricate politics of Austria and the South Tyrol is discussed, including a few surprises such as how and why the latter was returned to Italy. The fiction, or self-serving ploy, of the Austrians posing (or being presented as) 'victims' of 'Nazi aggression' and how the victors reacted to this theory is

treated: the Russians rejecting it consistently, the western Allies usually pretending to its reality for their own political purposes.

MacDonogh practices some of the expected moral equivalencing of Nazi crimes with postwar victor crimes, i.e. since the Russians, Poles, Czechs, et al suffered this or that at the hands of the Nazis, then it was only to be expected that revenge would be practiced. Interestingly, he cites an observation that of all the avengers, the Americans were not directly victimized by the Nazis and that the American hatred of Germans and a thirst to punish them was somewhat irrational. He does not mention, but hints, that this is was in consequence of the virulent Germanophobic propaganda of the war years. In connection with this, he provides an interesting history of the Morgenthau Plan and how it was ultimately rejected by Truman and the American military governors. Not out of sympathy for the defeated, but as something impractical as well as inimical to new 'Cold War' goals and requirements in which the German people would be required as a re-strengthened (but carefully controlled) bulwark against the new enemy in the form of the Soviet Union.

Denazification and the 'war crimes' trials are covered in some depth. He points out that the denazification process was uneven, impractical, and often pursued without much enthusiasm, the process itself eventually being quietly abandoned. The trials he correctly sees as without much legal basis and being little more than 'show trials' in pursuit of vengeance. He cites Paget's work on the von Manstein experience; interesting from a revisionist perspective, he discusses Paget's conclusions about the exaggerations and falsehoods re 'war crimes' in wartime Russia – which is itself of supreme importance given the strange new pseudo-reality of the huge majority of the alleged six million said to have perished in those vast domains at the hands of the Einsatzgruppen and others, instead of via the once ubiquitous gas chambers. This is a little understood and rarely mentioned part of the Holocaust story, but one of supreme importance given the numbers-juggling that has occurred after revisionist researchers have torn so many giant holes in the Auschwitz and 'gas chamber' legends.

This important book has an impressive notes section in which a great many little-known works are cited; Giles MacDonogh is fluent in German and relied heavily on original source materials in that language, most of which have not seen English publication.

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